HOUP-LA.

[Commenced Sunday, March 7, 1886.]

And then there arose throughout the length and breadth of the civilized world rumors that affairs were what the young subalterns in the Scarlet Lancers called "uncommonly groggy in the east," and very soon, from being thus lightly and carelessly termed "very groggy," affairs in the east began to assume a serious aspect; indeed, so serious, in truth, that they soon resolved themselves into orders for that regiment to hold itself in readiness for active service.

Next came the news of the bombardment of Alexandria, and then the Scarlet Lancers got their final orders, and the whole regiment was in a state of exultation and delight.

It is true that down in the very lowest depths of their hearts there lay many an anxious thought and care for those who must be left behind; many a doubt if the glory which might come was worth all the bloodshed and misery which it must cost; but on the surface, the bearing of each and all was fearless and gay; hope rose uppermost, and cost was set aside as a thing of naught.

There was a vast amount of chaff over the first appearance of the new uniforms—the serge tunics, with their heavily wadded spine protectors; the rough boots, with their ample leg bandages, and all the other paraphernalia ingeniously contrived to ward off the ill effects of the treacherous Egyptian climate.

Lacy expressed himself as most highly delighted with his great goggle spectacles, and walked about the barrack square wearing them for hours after they came into his possession—by way, he said, of getting used to the feeling of them.

And then came the last awful morning, a morning dull and gray, with drizzling mist and rain, the Scarlet Lancers sailed away to the mockingly gay strains of "The Girl I Leave Behind Me," some to win honor and glory, indeed, but all to run the risk of coming home again maimed and shattered, or, perhaps, when the war should be all over, to lie, the very flower of a great nation, rotting in Egyptian soil.

CHAPTER III.

There was very little of bravado gayety when the good ship Clyde slipped adown the channel that night. Officers and men alike were very quiet, and Tom Snow crept softly in and out of the cabin shared by his master with Lacy and Hartog, and laid out his mess things with silent and reverent sympathy for the gravity on that master's face, for Bootles had not, as yet, got over the agony he felt as he encountered the yearning misery in his wife's beautiful eyes, and as Mignon's parting sobs fell upon his ears. In truth, it was one of the three most bitter days that ever cast their shadow over the brightness of his pleasant and sunny life.

For himself, young Tom had no feelings save those of the wildest exultation and delight. Until the last moment he had never dared to think it possible he could accompany his master on the expedition. Night after night he had watered his pillow with tears at the thought of being left behind, and then—well, of course he was very sorry for the cause, and he pulled as long a face over the misfortune as anybody, though the young monkey's heart was beating and throbbing with joy at the chance it gave him. This was how the chance occurred. The very day before the regiment was to leave its quarters, Terry fell upon the stairs leading to one of the troop rooms, and slipped his knee cap.

Going was for him out of the question, and not to be thought of; in fact, nobody did think of it for a moment. And then Bootles had to cast about in order to find somebody suitable to fill Terry's place, for Terry, although he was in reality a groom, yet was accustomed to do much about his master's person.

"I'll take young Houp-La," he said suddenly to Mrs. Bootles, after he had gone over in his mind all the likely men he knew. "He knows how to do for me just as well as Terry does. I'll take him."

And so young Tom was rigged out in haste, and followed his master's fortunes into the land of the Pharaohs.

Bootles' choice proved to be a very wise selection. The voyage out was the most miserable time he had ever passed; true, he had at one period been more unhappy, but never had he known before what it was to really miss a daily presence out of his life, not one, but two—his wife and Mignon.

In every respect young Tom suited him; he knew just what he wanted, and just when he wanted it; he was great at holding his tongue, and never bothering his master with questions about this or that, as a strange servant must necessarily have done. He was intensely sympathetic to the sleepless pain in Capt. Ferrers' eyes; and, after all, what sympathy is there which is so sweet as the sympathy of those who themselves have known the extremes of pain and misery? Young Tom, too, was sympathetic in silence.

Then, moreover, apart from his services to his master, he proved quite a host in himself by way of relieving the tedium and weariness which the voyage was to the man, to whom every hour seemed the length of a day, every mile as long as a dozen. It is always hard to keep men amused and content on board ship, particularly on board a troop ship, where, with all ranks, life is a continuous fight for daily bread, to say nothing of comfort, from port to port.

It is a tedious and irksome enough time to the officers, who have the best accommodation which the ship affords; but for those who live between decks, with but few papers and amusements and but a limited amount of beer and tobacco, matters are still worse; and it is not easy to find words to convey anything like an adequate idea of what that life's weariness and ennui really is.

It was here that young Tom, from being only a sharp-tongued general favorite, suddenly grew, like Capt. Garnet's head, as Lacy remarked one night when they were steaming past the African coast, into "a gwreat and—er—shining light." With his master's permission and some help from the sailors, he got the tailor to make him up a set of clown's garments, and furbished up all his old circus tricks with such right good will that more than once he had the honor of appearing before the most distinguished officers on board the Clyde. He pleased them each and all so greatly that when he took his white hat round for contributions to the fund for the wives and children who had been left behind, he obtained so good a sum that Bootles, whose heart was tender to every man who could in any way approach or share his feelings on that subject, made it up to the even and respectable amount of £5 out of his own pocket.

And then at last they steamed into the harbor of Alexandria, and the voyage was over. For some of them it was very near indeed to the close of the voyage of life. But they never seemed to think of it, action was the order of the day, and dispiritedness and down-heartedness apparently had flown from their midst. All was energy and bustle—tall lancers clanked along the half-ruined eastern-looking streets, tramped in and out of the bazaars and cafés, laughing in good-natured British contempt at nearly everything they saw, grumbled in true British style at all discomforts, swore roundly at the flies and the dust, hob-nobbed with sunburned tars from the ships of war in the harbor, and scattered everywhere the energetic signs of British rule and occupation.

"I say, Bill," said one strapping, broad-shouldered red jacket to one of a group of his comrades one night, "wasn't the chaplain preaching about the seven plagues of Egypt the Sunday afore we left 'omes?"

"Ay!" responded Bill, sending a great cloud of smoke into the midst of a cloud of flies.

"Do you remember what they was?"

"Why," answered Bill, hesitatingly, "there was frogs, flies and lice—and darkness, and blood—that's four. And hail, and blains—I suppose they're boils, or wuss—and the loss of the firstborn."

"By gum!" ejaculated the first, "but old Pharaoh must have 'ad some grit in him to stand all that. I wonder if they had any baccy in them days," and then he, too, took a mighty draw at his big pipe, and let the flies in his immediate neighborhood have the full benefit thereof, after which he spat contemptuously into the midst of the swarm by way of distinctly adding insult to injury.

The flies did not particularly seem to appreciate the attention, and they forthwith settled down upon Private John Wood, No. 741, as if they had a special mission from Arabi Pasha to determine the exact value of "grit," as "grit" goes, in the ranks of the British army.

"Blowed if ever I knew the like o' this," quoth Private John Wood, No. 741. "Why, old Pharaoh must have 'ad a hide like Beezlebub."

CHAPTER IV.

Private John Wood, No. 741, was not the only man in the Scarlet Lancers whose "grit" the flies took an opportunity of valuing. They settled down upon Lacy as if he were a sweet and toothsome morsel such as did not often come in their way, which probably was exactly the true state of the case.

But Bootles they left strangely alone—perhaps he took after Pharaoh of old. Any way, certain it is that he suffered less from the climate and its attendant plagues than any other officer in the regiment, and it was partly owing to this—at least it was entirely due to his habitually cool and self-possessed demeanor, which he could not have maintained had the flies pestered him as they did some of the others, Lacy, for instance—that one evening, a few days after they had left Alexandria and Ramleh behind them, when he was lying half asleep in his hammock, a thump-thump sounded upon the wooden box which stood just outside the entrance to his tent.

"Yes—what is it?" he called out sleepily; then, as an orderly appeared in the doorway, asked, "Well, orderly; what is it?"

"The colonel's compliments, sir, and he wishes to see you as soon as possible."

"Very well. Tell the colonel, with my compliments, that I'll be with him immediately," he answered, and the orderly, saluting, disappeared.

With all haste he rolled out of the hammock, and straightened himself as regarded his hair and the fastenings of his undress jacket, buckled on his sword, and went off to the colonel's quarters, in ignorance that young Tom Snow, who had been loafing outside the tent until his master should shout for him when it was time to dress for mess, and so had heard the message which the orderly had brought, was following him, and that, when Bootles went in, he flung himself down upon the sandy ground, in blissful disregard of any plague that might be lurking there, be it Egyptian or otherwise.

The sentry on duty outside the colonel's tent, of course, noticed him, and uttered a facetious remark after the manner in which most of the Scarlet Lancers were accustomed to address the sharp-tongued, amusing little circus waif.

"Ello, young Houp-La. What may you be a-doing of?"

"I ain't a-doing of nothing," retorted young Houp-La, civilly, "except a-waiting of my master, Capt'n Ferrers, who you see a-going into the colonel's quarters jes now."

The sentry laughed and wheeled round on his allotted twenty yards of sentry-go, never dreaming of ordering young Tom off, for he was generally considered in the regiment as a thing of naught, beyond the fact of his being a favorite protege of Capt. Ferrers.

So there he remained, and there, with his sharp young ears pressed close to a little discrepancy in the canvas, which protected the officer commanding the Scarlet Lancers from the night dews and damps, Tom Snow, the circus waif, became cognizant of and acquainted with the details and particulars of one of the most important and dangerous missions which was intrusted to or accepted by any one of the officers and men who carried her majesty's uniform into the land of the Pharaohs in the campaign of '82.

He heard every word that passed between his master and the three gray-haired officers whom he found there.

It was not only a very difficult, but a very dangerous errand which Capt. Ferrers had been chosen to perform. The order was given in the simplest and most soldierly words, and so young Tom was able to gather its exact meaning as clearly as Bootles himself could do. In substance it was to convey a certain paper, written in cypher, to the officer commanding a body of troops lying about five miles from the Scarlet Lancers' camp, which was but a short distance from the town of Abu-Goum, held by a strong force of the rebels, under the command of Arabi himself.

To reach the other British camp the envoy must pass almost through the rebel lines, else he would find himself close under the walls of Abu-Goum on the one hand, or involved in the swamps which skirted the margin of Lake Goum on the other.

The general impressed upon Bootles the need for caution and dispatch as he intrusted the paper to his hands, not without first making him exactly acquainted with its contents in case of accident by the way, so that if the paper were damaged or rendered illegible he might not reach the other camp in ignorance of his mission.

And young Tom heard it all—every word! Not only heard, but saw! Saw the general give the paper—saw his master place it in a small pocket book of brown leather and bow himself out, after a silent grip of the hands outstretched to him—saw then that he left the tent and went hastily in the direction of his own—and, seeing that, the circus waif rose up from his post of observation and followed him swiftly.

When he reached Capt. Ferrers' tent he found his master bending over a brass-bound box which stood in one corner of it—a box which Tom knew contained his revolvers.

"Is that you, Tom?" he asked.

"Yessir," answered Tom, with a salute, and advancing into the middle of the tent.

"Take my flask round to the mess tent and get it filled with brandy—and be quick."

"Yessir," said Tom.

He never hesitated an instant what he should do. The moment he entered the tent he had seen that on the chest which formed his master's table Capt. Ferrers had laid down the brown leather pocket book which contained the all-important dispatch.

Quick as thought Tom snatched it up with the flask and ran out; once outside, he threw the flask to the winds and made for the outposts.

It was not difficult for him to pass them; on the contrary, in truth, he simply threw himself flat upon his stomach, and, by means of the snake trick on which he had so prided himself of old, wriggled past the various sentries with the stealth and noiselessness of an Indian scout. Having passed the last one he took the pocket book from between his teeth, where he had carried it for safety, and folding the precious dispatch neatly to half its former size, consigned it to a little pocket within the breast of his scarlet and black striped waistcoat, one which had been put there by Capt. Ferrers' orders, so that the lad might carry a few shillings in safety, and without fear of being relieved of it by pickpockets.

Then he threw the book away, and with a last look in the direction of the camp, turned his face toward the five miles of difficulty and danger which lay between him and the mission which he had taken upon himself—nay, which he had in reality stolen from him to whom it had been intrusted—difficult, because of the inky darkness of the night, and of his ignorance of the surrounding country (an ignorance which his master would greatly have lessened by means of a compass and a plan, two articles of which Tom had not thought); dangerous, because almost every yard of the way bristled with rebel muskets, every post and point was guarded and watched by vigilant rebel troops.

But the lad's brave spirit never failed him for an instant. He had not stood upon the trapeze platform and looked grim death hard in the face to be faint of heart now, when he needed all his courage.

He never thought of the harm he might be doing, still less of the risk he was running—only that his master, the captain, had been sent on this errand of danger, and that he, owing to his small size and elasticity of joint and muscle, and the particular form of training which he had undergone in the circus, could easily go in safety where his master could not expect to escape detection: nay, where he very well knew his master could not escape with his life.

It was only for a moment that he stood looking back upon the camp, which sheltered all he loved on earth; he could hear the steady and measured tramp of the sentries close at hand; he could see the more distant lights. Then a mist of tears blurred the picture. He dashed his hand across his eyes, plunged into the darkness, and was gone.

CHAPTER V.

Meantime, having seen that his revolvers were in perfect order, Bootles set about dressing himself for his expedition. He discarded his spurs and sword, and, indeed, everything which might serve to attract attention to him or make him an object more easily discernible in the darkness of the night.

There were among other things lying upon the makeshift table, a tin of milk biscuits, a jar of potted game, and a bottle nearly full of sherry. He poured out a tumbler full of the wine and hastily spread some of the potted game upon the biscuits, then continued his preparations, eating as he moved about the tent.

"What a long time that boy is," he thought, impatiently.

Tom was not usually so long about his master's errands, and his master, not unnaturally perhaps, wondered at his being so then, when there was so much need for haste. However, he pulled on his long cloak, which covered him up from head to foot, and slipped a dark blue cloth polo cap upon his head—this was safer than to wear the gold-laced forage cap of an officer.

And then, just as he was going to button his cloak, he remembered the pocket book, and turned to take it.

But it was gone!

But it was gone!

Bootles stood for a moment staring at the place where he had laid it down in the stupefaction of intense surprise. He had put it down *just there*, beside his flask, and with his gloves! He was certain of it—he could positively swear to it.

What on earth had got the thing?

He roused himself from his bewilderment, and turned all his pockets out, ran to the brass-bound revolver case and examined it; back to the table, and tossed everything that was upon it over and over. Made quite sure, in fact, that pocket book and dispatch were alike missing, and not to be found.

He felt it was no use staying there, wasting his precious time in ransacking boxes and turning out pockets which he had not touched that day. The colonel must be told at once; so, with a mighty effort, Bootles pulled himself together, and went out with a sinking heart to tell the tale of his own shame and dishonor.

For thus did he, in the agony and distress of mind which overwhelmed him, designate the carelessness, or the unsuspiciousness, which had allowed him to trust the honesty of others. He never for a moment suspected young Tom of being the thief, but he did think it just within the bounds of possibility that, while he had been bending down over the case of revolvers, some one had quietly crept in and carried off the pocket book.

But it came out after a while—after Bootles had got through that terrible interview with the colonel—terrible because of the pain it gave to both of them—after he had given up his sword and his parole of honor, and then had passed the night in his tent alone, lying miserably in his hammock with his arm flung across his eyes. Then it all came out! How his flask, a handsome silver thing, with crest and monogram emblazoned upon it, had been found as soon as morning light broke over the camp, not twenty yards away from his tent, how young Tom had never been at all to get the brandy for which his master had sent him, then how young Tom was missing, and had never been seen by any one in the camp since the sentry on duty outside the colonel's tent had accosted him with "Ello, young 'Oup La, and what may you be a-doing of?" Lastly—and worst confirmation of all—how the missing pocket book had been found just outside the most advanced outposts.

There could be no further doubt that Tom Snow was the delinquent—nobody had the slightest doubt about it, not even Bootles himself, though he stoutly declared his belief in the lad, and maintained that nothing could make him think young Tom was a traitor, except the most absolute and positive proof that such was the case. For once Lacy was absolutely angry with his best friend.

"My dear chap," he said, in tones which were distinctly tones of remonstrance, though he tried to make them those of calm reasonableness, "what—er—more pwoof can you want or have? The boy was sent to get your flask filled with bwrandy; he did not get it filled with bwrandy or anything else, but it is found instead only a few yards from your own tent. The boy is gone—the—er—dispatch is gone too. Nobody else in the whole camp is missing. It is wreally, Bootles, perfectly absurd to twry to shield the young wra cal any longer. The dispatch—er—could not go by itself—it's absurd—it—er—isn't in wreason."

"In reason or out of reason, I don't and won't believe that the boy has sold me," Bootles asserted obstinately.

"But he has stolen the dispatch," Lacy persisted.

"Oh, nonsense! What on earth should he do with it when he had got it?"

"Why, hand it over to Awrabi, of course. What else should he do with it?" retorted Lacy, sharply.

"Oh he has never done that, though some one else may. That is likely enough," answered Bootles carelessly.

But Bootles knew very well in his heart that it must have been Tom and no other who had taken the pocket book from off his table, though he did not for a moment believe that the lad had sold him.

The true solution of the mystery was that the boy, by listening outside the colonel's tent, had, according to his idea, gathered the object of the mission with which his master had been charged, and with that knowledge had also gleaned a very correct idea of the danger which must attend it—that he had stolen the dispatch, and was now in hiding, with the ignorant idea that if it were not there to be taken, his master could not take it. That young Tom had actually set off from the Scarlet Lancers' camp to carry that paper across the five miles of difficult and dangerous country which lay between the two British camps was an idea which never entered for a moment into Bootles' calculations.

But his opinion was not shared by any one else, at least no one else hit upon that idea as a solution of the mystery of Tom's conduct, and Bootles did not tell any one what he thought; he only stoutly maintained that he did not believe, and that he never would believe, short of positive proof to the contrary, that the lad had sold him.

So that miserable morning dragged its slow length along. What a long, long day it was! The entire camp seemed paralyzed by the loss of that paper, which had contained instructions for a simultaneous attack upon the city and the rebel forces on the third day from the date of sending the dispatch. It was useless to send out a duplicate; for not only was the cypher probably already in the hands of Arabi, but the vigilance of the rebels would be greatly increased, and so render it impossible for a messenger to pass between the two British camps.

Towards evening, when the shades of night were gathering around, an attempt was made to signal to the other camp by means of electric lights. Hitherto their trials in this respect had been but dismal failures, and it was as a last resort that the Scarlet Lancers attempted it now.

To their intense surprise, however, the answering flashes came back with precision and evident understanding, very different from the confused answers they had received before. This time there could be no mistaking their meaning, and apparently those on the distant shore were experiencing the same enlightenment.

"*All right!—Got your message.—Will act as you direct.*"

The signalist put the message together, and the group of officers who were standing round him stood staring blankly into one another's faces, struck dumb with astonishment and surprise.

"Are you quite sure?" asked Hartog at length of the officer who was in charge of the signals.

The signalist—a very smart engineer—laughed.

"Yes. Quite sure," he answered.

"Then that boy carried the message to save Bootles!" Hartog exclaimed.

"B—y Jove!" ejaculated Lacy, "and I've been vigorously blackening the poor little fellow's character al—l day—evewry time I had a chance. I—er—feel beastly ashamed of myself."

"Ask again—ask who took the message, and if he is there now?" suggested Hartog to the engineer, who complied willingly enough, and sent the inquiry flashing across the rapidly darkening sky, in which the brilliant stars were beginning to shine out one by one.

Then the reply came back in a series of vivid flashes:

"*A boy left camp on return journey with reply before daylight.*"

"Then the rebels have got him," Hartog cried, excitedly. "Poor little chap, they've got him sure enough."

The news spread through the camp in next to no time, and within half an hour, young Houp-La had as many good words spoken for him as during the day he had had bad ones. Everybody had something pleasant to say in favor of the brave little lad, who had thus heroically risked his life, and, poor fellow, had probably already lost it, for the sake of the master whom he loved with the fidelity of a dog.

As for his master, he went straight to the colonel and asked, with a strange huskiness in his throat and a blaze in his blue eyes, that a searching party might be sent out at once, and as far as was safe, in case the lad had been disabled and could not reach the camp.

"Certainly, certainly—and go yourself, if you care to do it, Ferrers," said the colonel, hurriedly, brushing his hand across his eyes. "Go yourself, if you care to do it. I have much pleasure in returning your sword. I am sure I sincerely hope the lad has come to no harm. 'Pon my soul, he is the hero of the campaign—'pon my soul he is," and then the kindly colonel shook his favorite by the hand, and brushed the other across his eyes once more.

Bootles said "Thank you, sir," and went out without another word, chiefly because there was a lump in his throat which made speech difficult.

It was not long before a party was ready to start, with Bootles at its head, to search for the missing boy. Nor was it very long before they found him—perhaps a mile from the rebel outposts—lying behind a clump of trees, faint and ghastly pale, his mouth parched and dry, and his sharp, young face drawn and distorted with pain.

Bootles was the first to hear his moan, and turned the light of the bull's-eye he carried upon the place whence the sound came. In another moment he was down upon his knees beside the prostrate form of the half unconscious boy.

Young Houp-La vaguely recognized his master as he tenderly raised his head upon his arm.

"*Water!*" he gasped, painfully.

Bootles filled the cup which formed the lower half of his flask with water, which one of the searchers had brought, and held it to the poor parched lips. It seemed to put new life into him, for he lifted his head and looked wildly round.

"Tell the capt'n I got there safe. The answer is in my waistcoat pocket. I couldn't get back as well. One o' them Arab devils potted me. I crawled as far's I could, but I couldn't get no further, though I see the camp lights jes' ahead." Then he perceived that Bootles was bending down over him, his kind face convulsed with grief and emotion.

"Is that you, sir?" he said, in a tone of gentle relief and satisfaction. "Don't take on about me, sir. I ain't worth it."

"Where are you hurt, my boy?" Bootles asked in a choking voice.

"Somewhere about the groin, sir. It's no use trying to move me," seeing that two of the men had opened a stout blanket and were preparing to receive him. "It's all over with me now. Don't you put yourself out about me, sir, I ain't worth it."

"Try and drink a drop of this," said Bootles, holding the cup once more to his lips. It had brandy in it this time.

"It ain't no good, sir," he persisted, but he swallowed the brandy and water, and then they raised him very gently and lifted him on to the rug. Not so gently, though, but that he groaned and moaned piteously with the pain, and slipped off into delirium again, talking wildly all the way back to camp of the success of his expedition, and how the commanding officer of the other camp, who had received the dispatch from him, had patted him on the shoulder and had called him a brave lad, and bade him God speed and a safe return.

And then, when at last they got him into camp and on to an ambulance cot, he came to his own senses again for a little time, and bade them send for the colonel that he might give the dispatch into his own hands.

"You're not angry, sir?" he said, imploringly, as the colonel took the paper. "I knew the capt'n couldn't go safe where I could, and I thought as 'ow it wouldn't matter so much if aught happened to me. You're not angry with me, are you, sir?"

"No, my boy, certainly not," answered the colonel, huskily. "You are the bravest lad in the army. I am proud of you, very proud."

Tom Snow drew himself up as straightly as he could against his master's breast, where he had been lying ever since they put him down upon the bed, and endeavored to salute the commanding officer. "I got there," he said, looking round at the faces about him, "and I got back 'ome again. It don't any of it matter now," and then he slipped off again and wandered on about the heat and the glare of the sunshine, of his awful thirst, and the pain of his wound. At last he tried to turn his head round to look at Bootles.

"Are you there, sir?" he asked, in a clear and sensible voice.

"Are you there, sir?" he asked, in a clear and sensible voice.

"Yes, my boy," answered Bootles, pressing the lad's head against his cheek, and holding him quite tight against his heart, as if he could not bear to let the all-powerful enemy, who was fast stealing upon them, wrest that faithful young life away from him.

The minutes passed slowly away and intense silence reigned throughout the tent; suddenly Tom spoke again:

"I ain't in no pain now, sir," he said with a satisfied sigh; "but I'm orful tired."

"Try and sleep a little," said Bootles.

"Yes; I think I'll try. I'm orful tired."

Then there was silence again—a silence longer, deeper, more profound than that which had been before—broken, indeed, only by the sound of the boy's sharp-drawn breath. Then that, too, grew fainter and less labored, and Bootles held the slight form yet closer in his arms—held it till the last faint sigh had fluttered through the whitened lips—held it, even though he knew perfectly well that the brave hero-soul had slipped away—held it closer and closer still, because he did not dare to look on the brave white face which had been faithful even to the very end, and had paid a debt of gratitude even by the sacrifice of life.

It was Lacy who approached him first.

"You'd better come away now, Bootles, old fellow," he said persuasively. "You can't do the poor little chap any good now."

Bootles allowed one of the doctors to unfold his arms and take the little body from him. Then he stood up and looked down upon it as it lay still and silent upon the bed, the sharp, young face at rest and peaceful now.

"I knew he hadn't sold me," he said in a shaking voice. "God bless him! he loved me better than himself;" and then he turned away and strode out into the darkness alone.

THE END.

Mrs. Treat, in her "Home Studies in Nature," says of bluebirds: When a pair of bluebirds succeed in rearing three broods in a season, in the autumn these broods unite and stay with the parents, making a little flock of about fourteen. All the autumn through they keep together, feeding from the same bushes—poke, ampelopsis and other wild berries—and upon stray insects. The first cold days of December send them to the cedar swamps, where great numbers congregate. Here, too, large flocks of robins keep them company. But each mild day brings the bluebirds from their retreat back to their unforgotten home, and there is nothing more fascinating in bird life than to see the frolics of the young birds and the grave demeanor of the parents. The young visit the various houses in which they were reared, sometimes two or three entering at the same time, and all the while keeping up their low, sweet twittering, as if conversing.

Speaking of George Woodbury's "Life of Poe," a critic says: And yet a sadder or more disheartening story could not well be told. There is hardly a gleam of brightness to relieve the somber shadow of a life that might and ought to have been so full of beauty and of worth. Poe was certainly one of the divinely gifted, and yet moral weakness and feebleness of purpose made him a wreck from the start. He was made up of the most contradictory elements; his nature was many-sided; but there was a fatal flaw in it all. The most charitable thing to think of him is that, if not actually insane, he always trembled on the verge of insanity, and was often irresponsible both for his words and actions.

STEAMBOAT EXPLOSION.

The Steamer Ike Bonham Blows Up—Her Watchman and Five Deck Hands Lost—Heroic Act of a Brave Woman.

The Sargent Line steamer Ike Bonham, Captain and Pilot Edward McElroy, Engineer Charles Girod, and Watchman Wm. St. Andrews, with Mrs. Sargent, owner, acting as clerk, left this port at 11 o'clock yesterday morning for Bayou Vidal and Roundaway after a load of cotton seed. When dinner was announced Capt. McElroy called Watchman St. Andrews to the pilot-house and gave him the wheel with instructions to hold her in the middle of the river until he eat dinner. When about two miles below Warrenton and off the lower side of Bedford's point, Capt. McElroy arose from the table and started to return to his post, and Mrs. Sargent followed a few feet behind. When he reached a point about ten feet from the office which was immediately aft of the pilot-house, there came a terific explosion and the flow of steam and smoke enveloped the entire front part of the boat. As soon as this cleared away it was found that the boiler had let go somewhere near its center, the forward half tearing away the entire front of the cabin and boiler deck, including the office, pilot-house, smoke stack, etc., and the after part of the boiler was thrown aft some feet. Wm. St. Andrews was never seen, though parts of the pilot-house seen floating in the river, some hundreds of feet ahead of the wreck, plainly indicated that he had been blown in that direction. On deck the effect was more disastrous, six colored deck hands having been blown overboard, only one of whom was recovered alive. Those who were lost are Louis Jones, Alf Magaree, George Payne, Mobile Harris and Jim ——, all professional "rousters" from this point. A number were injured by the concussion, among whom are Capt. McElroy, slightly scalded in face; Engineer Girod, badly bruised, Wm. Clifton, rouster, wounded in head, seriously; George Barnes, rouster, eye hurt, and Jim Alexander, fireman, seriously injured in left side. And all of these were more or less scalded. Mrs. Sargent had the back of her dress torn open caused by flying timbers. One of the deckers who was blown over, was rescued and put on board the barge which the Bonham had in tow, he being more frightened than injured. Immediately after the explosion the boat took fire, and Mrs. Sargent took a draw-bucket and put it out before it had an opportunity to gain any headway; she then took a shovel and threw overboard a number of red hot furnace brick which were beginning to scorch the deck. Engineer Girod says the boat was inspected last Friday and her boiler pronounced O. K. He further states that he cannot account for the explosion, as he was carrying ample water, as is evidenced by the amount of mud and water that was thrown over the entire boat. He was in the act of trying the water gauge when she let go; he fell backwards on the deck and when he recovered from the shock he still had the gauge stick in his hand. After the explosion the wind from the southeast blew the wreck and barge about four hundred yards onto the bar just below the point where she sunk in three feet of water and is laying on a level surface, the water coming within a few inches of her lower peck. The Bonham had a new hull put under her last summer and has been idle several months, this being her first trip for that period of time. She is valued at $4,000, and had no insurance. Capt. George Epple, on the steamer Sargent, was about two miles behind the Bonham when the explosion occurred, he being en route for Davis' Bend. He took the people and valuables off the wreck and brought them back to this city. He states that the hole in her hull is a very small one, and thinks he will be able to raise her without much trouble, although one of her hog chains were cut. Mrs. Sargent says the safe, which was located in the front part of the cabin near the office, was thrown ten feet back through the cabin, breaking two of the heavy iron castors off of it.

Engineer Girod and others of the survivors speak in the highest terms of praise of the calmness and bravery of Mrs. Sargent. She took charge of the boat immediately after the explosion, aided with her own hands in launching the boat's yawl (which was amidship on the lower deck), and commanding those in it to save those struggling in the water. The Sargent arrived here at 5 o'clock last evening.

Sudden Death of Mrs. Elizabeth Hunter.

Special to Commercial Herald.

YAZOO CITY, Miss., March 11—Mrs. Elizabeth Hunter, widow of the late well-known citizen, John O. Hunter, died quite suddenly last night. She was quite aged. She has lived in our midst since the earliest days of the city, honored, loved and respected. She leaves a large family of descendents, all among the best and most respected of our citizens.

Dr. C. A. Rice.

A petition signed by all the leading men of our city has been forwarded to the State senate, asking the members thereof to reconsider their action in refusing to confirm the nomination of Dr. Rice, as medical superintendent of the Meridian Lunatic Asylum. Dr. Rice stands very high in this community as a gentleman and physician. By the profession he is regarded as one of the brightest men in the State, and we sincerely hope that the senate will reconsider its action.